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PART I

THE AREA AS A WHOLE

CHAPTER I

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHINESE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

162 At the present time the number of persons regarding themselves as of Chinese race in Southeast Asia—Burma, Siam, Indochina, Malaya, British Borneo, Indonesia, and the Philippines—probably exceeds 8½ million in a total population of about 157 million. This means that the Chinese account for only 5 or 6 per cent. of the total, but, as will appear from the following pages, their importance, economically and politically, is out of all proportion to their numbers and is likely to be increasingly great.

The table on p. 2 represents the distribution of the Chinese in this area with what is thought to be a fair degree of probability.[1]

Having committed ourselves to this table, we should now try to justify it. There has been a great deal of loose statement regarding the number of Chinese in Southeast Asia, especially in Siam and the Philippines, which has been due to political motivation as well as to misapprehension. The validity of our arguments in attempting to arrive at something near the real figure will depend rather on a general knowledge of what has been happening in the area in the last few years and a feeling for the probabilities than on an application of demographic equations to statistics of varying value.

The first difficulty arises from the definition of 'Chinese'; the second from the up-to-dateness or otherwise of the censuses or enumerations.

The census officials in Burma, Malaya, British Borneo, Indonesia, and the Philippines have always apparently regarded 'Chinese' in an ethnographical sense, or rather, any person regarding him or herself as a Chinese, or who is so regarded by the head of the household or the enumerator completing the return, is so accounted for
•641 in the census. In Siam and Indochina, however, persons born in
162 the country have been regarded as citizens of the country unless

[1] But see discussion in Postscript.

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641 The essential nature of the overseas Chinese is, however, one thing: the traits of their character brought out by subjection to differing pressures and influences are another. In particular, the larger part of the area has for a long period been under the domination of European colonial Powers which, in spite of recent developments, to a considerable degree still maintain their hold. In the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya, Burma, British Borneo, and Indochina the Chinese have been subordinated to the colonial policies of Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, France, and the United States. In Siam, the solitary country to retain independence throughout (though she, too, was moulded by pressures from the West), the Chinese immigrants contributed to the well-being of the Siamese by their services and the admixture of their blood, but it was always the native aristocracy that held the power and, since 1932, the middle-class native revolutionaries. In post-liberation Burma the Chinese are a small minority who must leave the issues to be decided amongst the Burmese parties and communities; in Indonesia they are often uncomfortably at the point of impact of the opposing forces; in Indochina their plight is much the same. In Malaya the upshot of constitutional experiment and the campaign of Communist terrorists of their own race has placed them in a dilemma.

641 Throughout most of the period of our survey it has been a tenet
471 of the Chinese that they should leave political policy and adminis-
668 tration to the local Government, and this remains so in principle in spite of the increasing influence of nationalism and, latterly, of Communism in their midst. The outworn, but still, until recently, serviceable dictum that 'the Chinese don't mind who holds the cow so long as they milk it' has been true of all purely mercantile communities since the dawn of history, and virtually the same remark is indeed made by Communists of capitalism—that it does not mind who governs so long as it draws the profits. But with the growth of the Chinese communities in the Nanyang and the development within them of political awareness the saying has been becoming less and less true.

641 From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century the Chinese in
636 Southeast Asia found themselves, first in the Philippines, next in Indonesia, then in Malaya, and finally in Indochina, called upon to adapt themselves to a superstructure of government devised by completely strange and alien nations. These nations

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were almost entirely uninterested in them except as traders, labourers, or agents for dealing with the native peoples. In the last capacity the Chinese were very useful, for they had a knowledge of native ways which the Europeans lacked and in any case had no leisure to gain, being occupied so much of their time in warfare among themselves. The Chinese, in their turn, were interested in these white barbarians only to the extent that it was expedient to know their peculiarities. They showed themselves, however, much more adaptable to learning about the white race than the Europeans did to learning about them, for, generally speaking, the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, and the French were almost completely ignorant of the Chinese language and *mores*, and the Chinese were happy that it should be so. Another reason for the failure of Europeans to acquire any real knowledge of the people among whom they lived was that for the European life in the tropics—at any rate from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century—was short, and he either returned home with a competence within a few years or else perished. Thus it was found convenient by the Company and early colonial Governments to leave the conduct of their community affairs to the Chinese headmen, except in the more serious cases, and this gave the Chinese much liberty of action. Unfortunately the fears of the tiny minority such as were the Europeans, especially in face of the increasing numbers of the Chinese, put them in a very anxious and suspicious frame of mind. The Chinese ethos, usually so serene, was subject to occasional social squalls or typhoons when the community was seized with mass hysteria. This was really only a means of dispersal of an accumulation of real or imaginary grievances and the trouble subsided, if handled with reason and tolerant firmness, almost as quickly as it had arisen. But in the minds of the Europeans with their tiny garrisons the outbreaks were often interpreted as signs of rebellion. Indeed in some cases they were rightly so interpreted, and there can be no doubt that when fear and distrust had dried up relationship into a tinder a spark would fire it into a rebellion, as was the case in Manila on St Francis's Eve 1603, when things had gone so far that it was either the Chinese or the Spanish who had to be destroyed. It is equally certain that a greater degree of understanding on either side would have averted this and later disasters.

Whilst thus simplifying the situation, it must be conceded that

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In the course of this survey have been quoted numerous opinions on the merits or demerits of the Chinese as colonists in Southeast Asia. Many of these views have been highly critical and unfavourable. Yet they are more than offset in the minds of those of us who feel this bias by the recollection of tributes paid to the community by persons well qualified to make them—as, for example, the European ex-internee whom the writer met in Syme Road internment camp, Singapore, at the time of the Japanese surrender and who exclaimed to him, 'After this I shall *swear* by the Chinese.' (He referred to the many acts of kindness rendered by the Chinese to internees, to persons escaping from the Japanese, and others at the risk of their lives.) Again the writer, at the very moment that this paragraph was written, received a letter from an administrator of long standing in North Borneo in which he declared that 'the Chinese of North Borneo are, generally speaking, the salt of the earth'. Apart from enthusiastic tributes of this kind there are many just appreciations of the value of this people in the writings and reports of past administrators. Francis Light, the founder of Penang, said, 'The Chinese constitute the most valuable part of our inhabitants'; John Crawfurd regarded them as 'an intelligent, active, and commercial people'; Raja James Brooke of Sarawak said, 'Without the Chinese we can do nothing'; the Superintendent of the 1931 Census of North Borneo exclaims jubilantly in his report, 'the one bright spot . . . is the increase that is still shown in the numbers of the Chinese who can fairly be regarded as the mainstay of the commercial and industrial population'. And these examples could be greatly multiplied.

But the fact remains that a great deal of criticism has been levelled against the Chinese by persons, mostly Europeans, which can be boiled down to a few specific charges. The Chinese, it is alleged, are 'greedy', 'materialistic', 'parasitic', 'unconscionably usurious and profiteering', 'have a stranglehold on retail trade', 'have built up a wall against the admission of natives to their trade monopolies', 'form combinations obstructive to government', and 'create enclaves of Chinese nationalism within the countries they inhabit'.

Let us consider whether these charges have any weight.

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The Chinese in the Nanyang have never been in political control; they have therefore never had any political responsibility. The laws have been made by others. They have merely performed the functions the Governments have allowed them to perform.

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children's future with Malaya alone, were attracted to, or forced into, the Nationalist camp.

Malaya has for long been the 'test case' of Chinese affairs and a focus of interest in Southeast Asia. The situation as it was tending was very clearly described by a distinguished traveller many years ago; Professor Arnold Toynbee records the impression of his visit to the Straits Settlements in these words:

> And China is not only enormous already; it is rapidly getting more enormous (if logically that adjective can be put in the comparative degree). When I touched at the Straits Settlements on my way out east I realized that British Malaya is destined, by 'peaceful penetration', to become a Chinese province, and I fancy, from what I have heard, that the same destiny may be in store for Burma, Siam, French Indo-China, Dutch Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the end the current of Chinese expansion in the Tropics will meet the current of Hindu expansion over the submerged heads of the smaller and weaker and less efficient peoples in between, who are already fast going under. And, after what has happened, I surmise that the new frontier between China and India will tend, slowly but surely, to travel westward at India's expense and in China's favour.

What happened in Malaya, we cannot too frequently remind ourselves, was not the result of military conquest, not the territorial spoils of a Kublai Khan, but because the British had welcomed the immigration of a couple of million Chinese. For long after the intervention in the Malay States it had been found difficult to attract the British capital needed for the opening up of the country: it was not until a plentiful supply first of Indian and then of Chinese labour was assured that such capital was forthcoming, and it was not until the end of the 1920s that there was any control at all of Chinese immigration.

The British Colonial Office and the Malayan Governments must have seen that the admission of Chinese in such numbers that they would eventually be the majority community was bound to create a problem of tremendous magnitude. Even the degree of assimilation taking place in Siam and Indochina was out of the question because of the barrier of the Mohammedan religion. The only hope now for the future of Malaya in the interest of its diverse peoples was to promote a feeling of common Malayan citizenship to counter the claim, tacit or express, of Chinese Nationalism to consider Malaya as a new province of China. In the pre-war years

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this was a policy which the British neglected to pursue with any conviction, and the post-war experiment in this direction, the Malayan Union, was abandoned at the first sign of opposition. Unless a true 'Malayan citizenship' can be made effective, the ideal of a Malayan nation forming, as it were, a buffer State between China, Indonesia, and India, with bonds with all three but belonging to none, will remain a phantom.

In the present crisis the great and deplorable weakness of the Chinese in Southeast Asia is the absence of effective leadership (and the few notable exceptions to this generalization do not affect its truth). This is due in large part to the fact that there has grown up no Chinese middle class of sufficient proportions to provide disinterested, well-educated, and competent individuals in the numbers needed to guide their community through the reefs of politics towards a safe anchorage. The business leaders are so busy making money (or endeavouring not to lose it) that few of them have time to devote to public affairs even if they had the will and the knowledge. In Malaya, at least, the Indian stands in sharp contrast to the Chinese, and in Singapore Indian representation on the various bodies is vastly greater in proportion to their numbers than is the case with the much more numerous Chinese. This is not explicable solely by Chinese political pique but must be due largely to the training in politics and administration the Indians received in their own country during the British Raj. In Malaya, Indonesia, and Indochina the British, Dutch, and French have neglected to afford opportunities for the Chinese residents to acquire a knowledge of affairs. The penalty of this neglect is that now, when European control is loosening, the mass of the Chinese have few leaders to take control and to consolidate their community in face of the Communist advance. The lack of experience and education determines also the quality of the Communist leadership in these regions. Among the Malayan Communists are no Mao Tse-tungs or Chou En-lais and scarcely any individuals with more than the rudimentary mis-education obtainable in Chinese vernacular schools. The result is that the old professional bandit (always a feature of Malaya's jungle-fringe) is more prominent than he would otherwise be, and terrorism is unmitigated by constructive politics. Is it, therefore, strange that in 1949 the majority of Nanyang Chinese were 'sitting on the fence' awaiting the final upshot in China and its repercussions overseas? In such